

1.26.07 - State of the District

Rahall Report: State of the District

As I am sure most of you know, this is time of year for discussing the state of our union and the state of our state. Gov. Manchin gave his address recently, as did President George Bush. I, too, would like to share with you the State of our District, the Third District of West Virginia.

We have accomplished much since I shared with you my State of the District address this time last year -an address that was laden with sadness in the days following the tragedies at Sago and Alma mines.

As so often happens, out of these tragedies triumph has risen. This has been a landmark year for West Virginia coal mining.

This past June, for example, after many months of pressing for action, I joined my West Virginia colleagues in shepherding the MINER Act through Congress.

The MINER Act is milestone legislation, but it is just one marker on the long route toward ensuring the health and safety of our miners. The loss of two more miners recently in McDowell County and of 10 other West Virginia miners in addition to Sago and Alma last year are a somber reminder that when it comes to mine safety, we should always remain diligent.

In September, I worked to bring together another important initiative to improve mine safety - a \$4 million statewide mine safety and technology consortium, to be housed at WVU Technical and Community College. The Mine Safety Technology Consortium will be a catalyst to transforming West Virginia coal mining, know-how, skills and capabilities to produce superior coal mine safety and health technology, products and services, including training technologies.

And just a few days ago, I introduced legislation in the House of Representatives that will again change the face of our coal industry. Under the Energy Bill passed last week, \$14 billion in federal subsidies and giveaways for Big Oil companies will be repealed and invested clean renewable and alternative fuel initiatives like coal liquefaction.

As we work to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, West Virginia will be at the forefront, with plans for coal conversion plants already underway.

In addition to continuing my pursuit of legislation that will better protect our miners and benefit our coal industry, I have many goals for the coming year in the areas of transportation, technology and tourism, which I believe are the keys to

unlocking the economic potential of our region.

In the coming year, I hope to build on the successes of the Connected Technology Corridors Program. It is hard to believe, in some ways, that it has been almost a year since I unveiled this new initiative, but what a year it has been.

The Connected Technology Corridor Program, which encompasses projects for which I have secured \$9 million in federal dollars since 2001, is living up to the goals I had for it when I announced it last December. In fact, it is exceeding them.

With help from the Benedum Foundation, Verizon and Frontier Communications, the CTC has achieved its primary first-year goal of getting broadband connectivity to strategic business sites and there is currently or soon will be at least DSL or better in the municipalities in the 11 CTC counties: Webster, Nicholas, Pocahontas, Greenbrier, Mercer, McDowell, Summers, Fayette, Monroe, Raleigh and Wyoming.

We've got 490,000 square feet of technology buildings in place, under construction and in design in Beckley, Webster Springs, Hinton, Lewisburg, at Concord University, Bluefield State College, and at Montgomery/WVU Tech.

And 3,365 acres of business/technology parks are now in place, under construction or in design. These parks include the Princeton/Virginia Industrial Park and Mercer/East River Tunnel Tech Park in Mercer County, Indian Ridge Industrial Park in McDowell County, Wolfe Creek in Fayette County, Glade Creek in Nicholas County, Pocahontas Edray Technology Park, Fountain Springs in Monroe County, the JD Rockefeller, IV, Park in Wyoming County, two parks in Greenbrier County, two in Raleigh County and a park in Webster County.

Nearly 7,200 homes are in design and under construction in Greenbrier, Raleigh and Fayette counties and we are working to ensure these new developments have access to high-speed broadband service.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. We're rolling out DSL all over the Third District. Keep your ears open for another important development in the coming days.

In 2007, I will continue to work as hard as I did in the 109th Congress for southern West Virginia's important transportation infrastructure projects, including the King Coal Highway, Route 10, the Coalfields Expressway, the Shawnee Parkway and the Z-Way in Beckley. It is important the State be a full partner with us in these efforts and provides a full and fair share of its State and federal resources, and I will continue to work with transportation officials in Charleston to prove that southern West Virginia's projects will bring a defined economic benefit to the region.

In 2007, the Rahall Transportation Institute will further its mission of "building jobs through transportation." Right now, RTI is partnering with WVDOT on several research projects related to improving transportation infrastructure in West Virginia and is working closely with Norfolk Southern on the a new project of national significance, "the Heartland

Corridor," which will bring to this region a new state-of-the-art Intermodal Facility at Prichard, West Virginia. RTI is also working closely with CSX to expand the award-winning rail track stability research program at Marshall.

In addition, through the National Maritime Enhancement Institute, RTI has formed a new advisory council to secure funding for feasibility studies on improving and enhancing the Port of Huntington and is working on a demonstration project and the testing of new software for use by emergency responders as they monitor navigation along the Nation's waterways. And just weeks ago, RTI announced a new initiative to expand ongoing GPS deployment efforts to assist the law enforcement agencies in acquiring and employing GPS technology. This initiative is being funded by a \$493,000 COPS grant I helped secure last year.

Working together with the RTI and Marshall University, we will harness the potential of the Ohio River, improve the transportation infrastructure of West Virginia and fulfill our shared vision of building jobs through transportation.

As a senior Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I will continue to oversee federal transportation policy. The Committee is scheduled to take up a reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration, which is an important bill for southern West Virginia's rural airports. I will work on this bill to ensure our rural airports remain competitive and receive the federal investments they need to prosper. Many of our rural airports are economic engines for the communities they serve and the FAA legislation on which I will be working is integral to their success.

The tourism industry has much to look forward to as well. Just this week, the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine and Mayor Emmett Pugh unveiled plans for a \$3.5 million renovation, for which I secured \$650,000 in federal funds. This initiative, combined with \$550,000 for the establishment of the Greenbrier Valley Visitors Center and other investments across southern West Virginia will keep our tourism industry booming well into the 21st century.

I was also presented recently with a report on the 10-month study of southern West Virginia music, which was funded with a \$97,000 development grant I secured. The findings of this study has made it abundantly clear that with more people visiting southern West Virginia such a facility would help educate visitors on WV's diverse and unique culture. So we are moving ahead with this important project.

These are just a few examples of my goals for southern West Virginia in the coming year. A spirit of optimism is flowing through the Mountain State and I am confident that greater things await us. As 2007 gets underway, I look forward to continuing my service to southern West Virginia and to each of you as your Representative in Washington. Rest assured, I will do my part as the Third District's Representative in Washington to ensure that 2007 lives up to its promise.

U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) represents West Virginia's 3rd District